

## Chapter 8

### OPEN SPACE

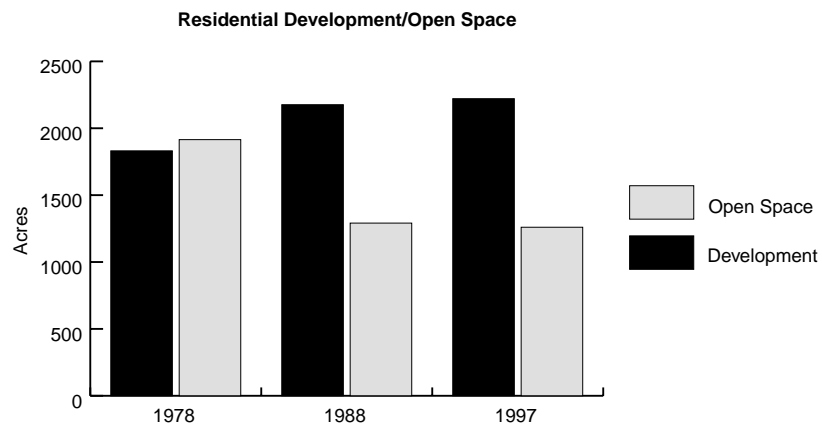
Open space in Chatham Township is without a doubt its most valuable natural resource. Open space is defined in the Morris County Master Plan Open Space Element as undeveloped land that serves a variety of functions and that provides essential character to a particular region. Open space can protect the quality and quantity of surface and groundwater resources, preserve distinctive natural, cultural, and historic resources, and provide space for developing facilities to satisfy the recreation needs of citizens. Open space can also provide visual relief in densely populated areas and preserve natural beauty. The Morris County Open Space Plan recommends that local governments ensure a proper balance between natural resource protections, adequate recreation space, and other competing land uses through open space planning. Planning for future open space is urgent. Development interests are placing escalating pressures on these undeveloped areas. Opportunities to preserve open space are rapidly diminishing.

#### Publicly Owned Open Space

Nine municipal parks comprising approximately 90 acres are located throughout the Township. The parks range in size from the 0.2 acre Green Village Park to the 33.3 acre Shunpike Park. All of the municipal parks contain active recreational facilities, such as ballfields, playground equipment, tennis courts, and picnic areas. The federal government is the largest landholder in Chatham Township with 26% of the total land area, 1549 acres. Morris County Parklands account for 476 acres of open space with the Great Swamp Outdoor Education Center and portions of the Loantaka Brook Reservation and the Passaic River Park.

#### Privately Owned Open Space

Chatham Township's privately owned open space dropped from 1,915 acres in 1978 to 1,260 in 1997 (a 34% decrease) according to information from the Township planning consultant. Privately owned open space accounted for 20% of the Township's land area (6008 acres) in 1997. In contrast, it accounted for 32% in 1978 (see Figure 15).



**Figure 15: Chatham Township Land Use by Acres**

Source: Chatham Township Master Plan, 1999

Commercial recreation facilities and non-profit organizations within the Township provide 209 acres of open space. These include a private golf course and a private swimming club. The fire departments have ballfields; and an ice rink.

The privately owned open space lies in three principal locations: along Loantaka Brook, between developed areas and the Great Swamp, and between developed areas and the Passaic River.

### **Decreases in Open Space**

Since the original Natural Resource Inventory was published in 1974, Chatham Township has sustained substantial losses of 3 of the 10 inventoried sites (see Appendix K for maps of the 1974 Inventoried Open Space). One area, then called "The Orchard" (Long Hill above Meyersville Road), now has 3 new streets: Tree Top Lane, Molino Drive, and Jodi Lane — all lined with many new homes. The second, called "Southern Boulevard," has a new road. The stream under Southern Boulevard near Jay Road has been partially contained in a large pipe and homes have been built along the new Geoffrey Court. The third area, the "Averett Site," south of River Road, now supports 900 townhouse units, tennis courts, swimming pools, and a small sewage treatment plant. The area is presently called "Heritage Greene," "Chatham Glen," and "Sutton Woods." Its natural streams are now drainage ways and the pond that used to be in a wooded setting is now a detention facility.

For purposes of the Open Space Index, Open Space is defined as all the lots or parcels of land in Chatham Township owned publicly, privately, or commercially which either contains no habitable dwelling, or which is subdividable even though it contains an inhabitable dwelling. The properties containing no inhabitable dwellings are called "class I" properties. A current list of class I properties in Chatham Township is maintained by the Morris County Tax department and is available upon request for a small fee. The subdividable properties have been determined by an inspection of the current Chatham Township Tax Maps with the assistance of the Planning Board Manager, who has personal knowledge of all the subdividable properties.

See Appendix E for a listing of all lots in Chatham Township which do not have a dwelling on the site. These lots are listed on the County tax roles as Class 1 properties. They are listed by Block, Lot, Owner Classification, and Page Number of the Township tax map book. See Appendix F for a listing of all lots in Chatham Township which have a dwelling and are of such size that they could be subdivided to create two or more homesteads. These lots are listed by Block, Lot, Acreage, Owner Classification and Tax Map Page Number.

For further information, see the Chatham Township Open Space Element

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

*Background Studies, Master Plan Revision*, Township of Chatham 1997.

*A Natural Resource Inventory*, Chatham Township Environmental Commission, 1974.

*Open Space Element*, Morris County Planning Board, 1988

Tax Records, Morris County